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National Child Labor Committee (U.S.)

Unprotected children in occupations not usually...

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National Child Labor Committee
105 EAST 22D STREET
NEW YORK CITY

UNPROTECTED CHILDREN

IN OCCUPATIONS NOT USUALLY COVERED BY CHILD LABOR LEGISLATION

308
Box 769

NEW YORK, 1905

A report based upon the investigations of the Pennsylvania Child Labor Committee, Miss Helen Marot, Secretary, discussing chiefly the condition of children not protected by Pennsylvania laws. Similar conditions exist in so many states that this leaflet has many lessons and suggestions for other states as well.

Ordered printed by the Press Committee of the National Child Labor Committee, January 25, 1905.

SAMUEL MCCUNE LINDSAY,
Secretary.

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Box 769

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THE UNPROTECTED CHILDREN.

Many States now give some protection to children in factories by laws regulating the age at which such work may begin, the hours and conditions of such employment. All such legislation, however, is still far behind the progress of our civilization and must be extended and the standard raised. There is no American State so far advanced in this respect that its citizens have not good cause to feel ashamed of the evils of child labor in their midst.

While factory children enjoy some measure of protection, there are many occupations in which very young children are employed to which child labor laws usually do not extend.

Such are the boys in theatres, restaurants, hotels, bowling alleys, newspaper offices, barber shops, the messenger and telegraph boys, the bell boys, the stable boys, the boys in slate and stone quarries, the boys working as stone cutters, boys selling newspapers on the street, in brick yards and on farms, in domestic service, in depots, slaughter houses, carpenter and blacksmith shops, in armories, in saloons, pawnshops, tailor and barber shops, in department stores, in small stores,—such as groceries, meat shops, drug stores, millinery stores, —in publishing offices and business offices of various kinds, as errand boys, as water car-

riers for railroads and for men at work on the streets, as helpers for painters, paperhangers, photographers and cabinet makers, as window cleaners and gas pipe cleaners, as peddlers, on wagons,—such as express, package and delivery wagons, huckster, newspaper, ice, butter and milk, laundry and advertising wagons,—on carts of various sorts, on boot-black stands, and at home on factory products.

There is no law in most States which imposes limitation of hours on the labor of children so employed, or requires even a minimum amount of knowledge, or holds their employers responsible for the conditions of their employment. In Pennsylvania the school law compels these children, as it does all children, to go to school until they are thirteen, and thus indirectly limits the age at which they can work; but this limitation of the law may be evaded by parents swearing falsely to the employment certificates required by the factory act, although the children at work and holding these certificates do not come under the protection of this act.*

MESSENGER BOYS.—There is no class of working children which so needs the protection of the State as the messenger and telegraph boys. The Superintendent of the Postal Telegraph Company, of Philadelphia, estimated that his company employed during the busy season from three hundred to five hundred boys in the American District service and from one hundred to two hundred in the Postal. The Superintendent of the Western Union Telegraph Company estimated that the company employed, on an average, two hundred and seventy-five boys at one time, but during the course of the year two thousand boys passed through the service. Probably, the same proportion would hold good in the Postal Telegraph Company.

In the Western Union there are five hundred and twenty employes holding positions higher than messengers. Taking this figure in connection with the two thousand boys employed by the company in one year and the two hundred and seventy-five boys in the service at one time, gives some idea of the truth in the claim, so frequently made by the managers, that the opportunities offered the boys for promotion are unusually great. The Superintendent of the Postal Telegraph Company admitted that their force of employes above the messengers was only to a small degree made up from the force below. He said that the boys usually have not enough education to fill higher places; also, that the messengers frequently have opportunity for making more money than they would receive the first year in a clerical position, and that such boys were unwilling to relinquish these opportunities, even with the chance of greater promotion to follow.

Here are the ages of seventy-six of the messenger and telegraph boys employed by the

* See leaflet entitled Illiteracy Promoted by Perjury.

Western Union and Postal Telegraph Companies:

1	is	10	years	old
6	are	11	"	"
18	"	12	"	"
24	"	13	"	"
16	"	14	"	"
11	"	15	"	"

Two-thirds of these are under thirteen years of age, and over one-half left school at the age of 12.

8	left	at	the	age	of	10
15	"	"	"	"	"	11
25	"	"	"	"	"	12
18	"	"	"	"	"	13
3	"	"	"	"	"	14
3	"	"	"	"	"	15

More than half of them left school in the 4th grade.

1	left	in	the	1st	grade
2	"	"	"	2d	"
8	"	"	"	3d	"
15	"	"	"	4th	"
6	"	"	"	5th	"
7	"	"	"	6th	"
2	"	"	"	7th	"

These conditions are typical and not exceptional.

Messenger boys are usually paid by the piece, so that the weekly wage in consequence is a variable one, which is rendered still more variable through tips which the boys receive on delivering a message. In a few of the offices they are paid by the week.

These offices are situated in districts where the population is distributed over a wide area and where the boys have longer distances to travel and therefore cannot deliver so many messages as the boys in other districts. In these offices, the wages vary from ten to twenty dollars a month. The usual rate paid the boys for a message is one-half the charge of the "service." For telegrams, they are usually paid one and a half cents; in some offices the rate runs as high as four cents, but these are very exceptional. The weekly wage of twenty-three messenger boys between eleven and fifteen years of age averages $4.12; the lowest wage of these boys is $3.00, and the highest wage is $9.00. When the boys estimate their weekly wage, they state at first the highest they can remember having ever received. There are exceptional weeks, like Christmas and New Year's, which stand out in the boys' memory. Their wage these weeks is often double their usual wage. An intelligent boy of thirteen, who had been a messenger for seven months, gave a detailed account of his wages to a club worker. The most successful week he had taken home $5.25; another week, $3.94; another, $3.50, and still another, $3.25.

The payment of wages in irregular sums to irresponsible and undeveloped children leads to an expenditure which is equally irregular. Where children receive a fixed weekly wage, they are obliged to turn all, or a definite sum, into the family account. Usually, a certain

fraction of this weekly wage is allowed them for their own expenditure. In this way a check is placed on their expenditures by parents and guardians. But the boys who can make any accounting they please at home will often improve the opportunity which their irregular wage invites, for deception and cunning dealing with their parents. They have every opportunity for secreting a part of their earnings, and the temptations on the street to spend money are constant. It is a common observation that the district messengers are clever beyond their years, and it is not uncommon to find that the boys agree with this opinion.

The part of their wage the boys decide they can keep for their own expenditure without exciting family suspicion is frequently not large enough to enable them to gratify their temptations. A device of their own for increasing their weekly wage is to charge for messages over and beyond the regular rates. A trick of the trade is not to report a message "caught on the fly." This happens when a boy is out on an errand and he meets someone who wants a message delivered at once. If the distance is not too great, he can deliver the two messages and report only the one, and can retain the money he receives from the second. Another device is to report at the office, after answering a call and delivering a message, that "the lady said she'd call again, she wasn't quite ready." If successful in the deception, the boy retains the money paid for

the call. Another device is the writing of bogus messages and telegrams. A boy of fourteen, who had been in the messenger service since he was ten years old, had learned to write bogus telegrams and had collected ten dollars in this way from prominent people of Pittsburg. He was at last arrested and taken before the Court. He stated that the other boys had taught him to do this and that it was a common trick among them.

> James, a little fellow of twelve years of age, who was arrested for stealing, had regularly met other boys in back alleys and planned thefts for the day. He was arrested with another boy for stealing fifty dollars. They announced that their intention was to go West and shoot Indians. The boy could neither read nor write.
>
> Another messenger boy of thirteen, when arrested, confessed that he had learned to steal from the other messenger boys with whom he worked.

Mr. Nibecker, Superintendent of the House of Refuge, near Philadelphia, was asked: "Have you, in disproportionate numbers, boys who formerly engaged in some one particular occupation?" His prompt reply was: "District messengers." Probation officers bear Mr. Nibecker out in this. They agree that no employment except selling newspapers is so demoralizing.

As is well known, the district messenger is a confidential employe of men and women leading disreputable lives. They not only entrust him with notes, but send him off with

verbal messages. He often spends the morning shopping for gloves, shoes and other apparel, and in the evening he buys cigarettes and makes the necessary purchases for a Bohemian supper. The largest tips he receives come from the "sports" and "guys," as he calls them, and he gives this as a reason for his preference for the calls which come from disreputable houses. "We always fight for these calls," the boys say, "because we never get less than twenty-five or fifty cents in tips." When the boys are asked how they know which houses are the disorderly ones, they seem to have some difficulty in explaining. One boy said: "Oh, that's easy, you can tell them when you see the people." Another said: "You can tell by the clothes they wear." And another said: "By the way they talk." One boy said the clerk in the office always told him before he went.

> Cliner gave his experience as follows: "We have a good many calls in the bad district. Nearly every house there has its messenger call. We get the best tips there, too. They often send you to the Yokohama joint on R—— street, to get something for their supper. At five of the houses they always give you fifty-cent tips, and the boys fight when these calls come; they all want to go." Cliner gave the streets and numbers of several of the houses, but he had a grudge against 718 N. ——— street, because they are "stingy."

The calls from these houses come in the morning as well as at night. Max, a boy of

thirteen, is an experienced shopper, buying shoes and gloves for the women at 405 S. ——— street.

The nominal hours of the boys, as given by the superintendents of the head offices throughout the city, average nine a day, but this average is far below the hours of many of the boys. Many of the boys work regularly ten and twelve hours a day and many of the offices are open on Sundays. Each boy is off duty usually every other Sunday. The boys work on shifts, or on "slip tricks," as they call them; that is, one week the boys go on service at seven in the morning and continue until five o'clock in the afternoon. The next week their day begins at eight, the next week at nine, and so on. The slip trick at night may begin at 6 P. M. and last until seven in the morning, or at 7 P. M. and last until seven in the morning; but these hours are nominal. If an office is busy, and the boy is needed, he may not refuse to work overtime. As they pay him by the piece instead of by the week, the manager of the office usually thinks he is treating him fairly when he retains him for extra work. With the press of business the manager cannot be expected to notice how worn the little fellow may be after a long day of twelve hours or more.

In one office where six boys are employed, the regular hours are sixty-six per week; that is, five boys are working sixty-six hours and one boy sixty, each boy having his turn at a sixty-hour week. The office is open on Sunday,

but only one boy is kept at work. The week a boy is on for a full seven days, he works seventy-seven hours.

In another office where nine boys are employed, they work twelve hours a day, seventy-six a week. Every fourth Sunday a boy is off. Some of the boys in this office work overtime, sometimes at their own request.

The payment of wages in irregular sums to irresponsible children; the character of the service the children are often required to perform; the long and irregular hours, as well as the night hours,* are the several conditions which have made the messenger service a peculiarly unsuitable occupation for children.

SMALL STORES.—The factory law prohibits the employment of children under thirteen years in mercantile industries, but mercantile industries, as the term is construed by the factory inspectors, means department stores. There never has been any attempt by the factory inspection department to restrict the employment of children in the small stores. In these stores, as elsewhere, the running of errands is pre-eminently a boy's occupation. The small stores find plenty to occupy boys of ten years and upwards. On Fridays and Saturdays, for many of the stores, they run errands from six in the morning until midnight.

*See leaflet entitled Children Who Work at Night.

One boy carries heavy baskets for a produce store during these hours on Fridays and Saturdays. Another boy of ten years of age has for four years been regularly employed to deliver goods for a grocery store, a tea company, and to run errands for another store, which does not clearly state its business. Another lad of thirteen has been employed since he was ten to run errands for five different stores, and another of twelve for three different stores.

Alfred G. began work as an errand boy for a grocer when he was eleven years old; he is now fourteen and has risen to a higher social plane, in his own estimation, in following the occupation of bell boy in hotels. He has held two such positions. His hours in one hotel, where he is now at work, are from seven in the morning until seven in the evening during two days in the week, and from seven in the morning until four in the evening during four days in the week. At the first hotel he worked alternate days, his hours varying from six in the morning until noon and again from six in the evening until midnight on one day; the next day his hours were from noon until six in the evening. While working at the hotel he was arrested for larceny.

At eleven years a boy was employed in a pawn shop. He received one dollar a week for keeping it swept out and making himself generally useful. He is now seventeen years old and employed in another pawn shop as errand boy.

HUCKSTERS' WAGONS.—Boys of ten years and upwards help on hucksters' wagons.

When Hyman T. came to this country from Russia he was eleven years old. On

his arrival he was put to work on a huckster wagon. Two years later he was put to work in a factory. He is now fifteen years old and can neither read nor write.

Lawrence's mother died when he was eleven years old. His father was a drunkard, and in a short time after his wife's death had pawned all the household possessions. Lawrence then shifted for himself. His first work with a huckster lasted two years. His want of schooling or training of any kind made it difficult for him to find work which returned him a fair wage. For three years he has tried various kinds of work, and, in a poor way, has kept himself going, but he is in ill health. He is a nervous boy and suspicious of even those who try to befriend him. He has a wild way of glancing around and back, as though pursued. When Lawrence was last heard of, he had joined a band of gypsies, with whom he had spent three summers. He had tried to "stick it out" on the huckster's wagon, but found the work too hard.

Benney J. worked on Coxey's newspaper wagon, helping to deliver the papers as they went up town. He worked on the wagon for two years,—when he was eleven and twelve years old. Little is known of Benney between thirteen and fifteen. At fifteen he was sent to the House of Refuge.

Harry H. left school in the third grade, when eleven years old. He has worked for nine months on a wagon which delivers cloth.

BOOT BLACK STANDS.—Boys of various ages help on boot-black stands. When the stands are on the inside, or even on the outside, of saloons, the boys often divide their

time between the master boot black and the bartender, wiping glasses and clearing up for the latter.

BARBERS.—Barbers take on small boys as apprentices. They commence as young as ten years, receiving no wages during their apprenticeship.

Harry G. went to work at twelve in a horse net factory, but left there to learn the barber's trade. His hours at the shop were from eight in the morning until nine at night, and on Saturdays until midnight. On account of his long day on Saturday he was given a half holiday on Monday. He is now fifteen and is at the House of Refuge, having been arrested for stealing.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.—A boy of eleven years worked in a slaughter house for a year. He is now in the House of Refuge. There is no necessary connection between his employment and arrest, but certainly the sights of a slaughter house are not of the kind to have a salutary influence on a child of eleven years.

BOWLING ALLEYS AND THEATRES.—In some of the bowling alleys, boys begin work at ten o'clock in the morning and work until midnight. Sometimes the boys are detained until one or two o'clock in the morning.

Horace V. was a setter-up at F———, but joined a gang of boys, and one night they broke into and robbed the bowling alley.

Before Charles B.'s commitment to the House of Refuge he worked some evenings in a bowling alley and others in a theatre, distributing programmes. In the day time, at irregular intervals, he drove an advertising wagon. Charles has never been to school, and can neither read nor write.

Another boy, who is now in the House of Refuge, was employed at the X—— Theatre when he was eleven years of age. A boy of thirteen was employed in the office of the Z——— Theatre from ten in the morning until ten at night.

Out in Pittsburg a boy of twelve years of age was sent every night to sell popcorn in the gallery of one of the lowest theatres in the city. For some weeks he returned all the money he made to his mother, but his work brought him in contact with a gang of rough boys, who taught him to rob the men in the theatres who had succumbed to the influence of liquor. Eventually, he was arrested and taken before the court. "Robbing the drunks" is one of the popular pastimes indulged in by the boys' gangs in Pittsburg, and in the galleries of the theatres they have exceptional opportunities.

A REASONABLE PROTEST.—A manufacturer very justly protested against legislation which discriminates against the manufacturers who subject their youthful workers to no greater hardships than those imposed by other employers. Certainly, the injustice which deprives a child of its school life is no greater if it works in a factory than if it works in a bowling alley, a theatre, a store or an office. Also, the physical strain

resulting from factory life is no greater than the strain to which the messenger boy is subjected during certain seasons of the year and in certain districts of cities. From a moral point of view the evil of early employment exists in other industries besides manufactures. The primary reason for child labor legislation is that no child during its early years can be used for industrial purposes without robbing it of its childhood.

The following leaflets published by the National Child Labor Committee may be had upon application to Samuel McCune Lindsay, Secretary, 105 East 22d street, New York city.

1. "The Organization of the Committee, its Membership and Statement of Objects." 8 pp.
2. "Illiteracy Promoted by Perjury." Pp. 16.
3. "Children Who Work at Night." Pp. —.
4. "Unprotected Children." Pp. —.

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